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Promoting social integration

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2008/19, in which the Council decided that the priority theme for the 2009-2010 review and policy cycle of the Commission for Social Development should be "Social integration", taking into account its relationship with poverty eradication and full employment and decent work for all.

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I. Introduction

1. The World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March 1995, defined the objective of social development in general and social integration in particular as the creation of "a society for all". Social integration is the process of building the values, relations and institutions essential for the creation of such an equitable and dynamic society, where all individuals, regardless of their race, sex, language or religion, can fully exercise their rights and responsibilities on an equal basis with others and contribute to society.

2. The very goal of social integration is to bring all social groups and individuals into the political, social, cultural and economic structures of a society so that they can participate in the decision-making process and improve their access to opportunities. The process of social integration requires the creation of a solidarity-based consensus that exclusion should be minimized and all those who are disadvantaged should be helped by the society at large.

3. Since the World Summit for Social Development, international efforts to advance social integration have largely focused on addressing the special needs of certain social groups. As a result, several new mandates and instruments have been adopted such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing,[1] the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond,[2] the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[3] and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.[4] Although addressing the special needs of certain social groups is critical to advancing their inclusion in the mainstream of society, this falls short of the broad social integration paradigm endorsed by the World Summit for Social Development. At the national level, there have been numerous efforts to identify the risk factors of social exclusion and many Governments have pursued policies aimed at combating exclusion, often with a focus on the most marginalized groups or individuals.

4. In the current phase of globalization, labour markets have been evolving in the direction of greater levels of economic insecurity and greater levels of most forms of inequality, many of which have a direct adverse effect on social cohesion. In the longer term, situations of pervasive unemployment, underemployment or poverty generate social exclusion. Moreover, socio-demographic changes such as rapid urbanization, population ageing, increased migration and the break-up of traditional family structures pose particular challenges to social inclusion. Consequently, effective social integration and social inclusion measures are urgently needed to address a widening spectrum of risks, vulnerabilities and exclusions.

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[1] *Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8-12 April 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] See General Assembly resolution 50/81.

[3] General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex I.

[4] General Assembly resolution 61/295, annex.

II. The importance of social integration for social development

A. Social integration and related concepts

5. As defined in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Development,[5] *social integration* is both a goal and a dynamic and principled process in which societies engage to advance social development. It aims at fostering stable, safe and just societies, where all human rights are respected and all enjoy equality of opportunities, including vulnerable groups and persons. It is also understood as the capacity of people to live together with full respect for the dignity of each individual, the common good, pluralism and diversity, non-violence and solidarity, as well as their ability to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life.

6. Disregard for social integration may lead to violence, conflict and abuse. It perpetuates inequality and exclusion. It prevents individuals from reaching their full potential and contributing actively to society.

7. The concept of *social inclusion* sometimes equated with social integration, has been used with increased frequency, both in intergovernmental debate and in policymaking. It is sometimes thought that the concept of inclusion better reflects the goals of social justice and equality, especially in the context of achieving "a society for all". Social inclusion is often seen as an action Governments can take to create more integrated societies. The degree of social inclusion also depends on the level of support from local communities, civil society and families and their participation in the life of a society as citizens with both rights and responsibilities.

8. It is increasingly recognized that economic inclusion is key to achieving overall inclusion. Economic inclusion depends on economic growth but it is mostly understood as equality of opportunity in employment and training. The provision of minimum standards of living, including access to health care, education and housing, are the basic elements of socio-economic inclusion.

9. The term *social exclusion* is often used to denote the absence of social inclusion, but the two notions are not exact opposites. People may be excluded from society in some respects while being included in others. Certain social groups may achieve internal cohesion while the society as whole may be fragmented.

10. Exclusion has economic, social and cultural dimensions. Economic aspects of exclusion encompass exclusion from the labour market and access to assets. Social and cultural aspects refer to exclusion from access to social services, means of communication, community and family support or State protection. Such economic, social and cultural exclusion leads to political exclusion, where individuals are prevented from exercising their rights as citizens, including access to decision-making.

11. Social exclusion may be linked to the existence of discrimination and/or be an outcome of market failures. It could also have its origins in unique power or exploitative relations. It is often rooted in unequal patterns of development between rural and urban areas and unequal distribution of assets, including human capital.

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[5] *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

12. Social exclusion is closely related to the notion of vulnerability that stems from unequal relations rather than occasional economic or environmental troubles. Socially excluded groups and individuals are made vulnerable not only because they do not have adequate assets to sustain them in times of crisis. They also endure discrimination and are typically locked into unfair, mostly informal networks based on discriminatory and abusive patron-client relations perpetuating their vulnerability.

13. In different countries, different groups are excluded. In some, the unemployed may be the most vulnerable. In others, ethnic, religious and cultural minorities are at the greatest risk of exclusion. In many countries migrants face particular disadvantages. It is important to discern the different causes of exclusion that particular groups or individuals may face in a particular national context and understand the processes leading to exclusion.

14. The ultimate goal of social integration and policies aiming at the reduction of exclusion and the promotion of inclusion is *social cohesion*. Social cohesion denotes a capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding polarization and conflict. In a socially cohesive society, people share values that help to reduce inequalities in wealth and income and human relations, and social bonds are strong.

15. In a socially integrated society, all belong, while in a socially cohesive society there is also a clear consensus on what creates a social compact with acknowledged rights and responsibilities for all citizens. Thus, social cohesion can be understood as the willingness of individuals to cooperate and work together at all levels of society to achieve collective goals.

16. Social integration as a process leading to the establishment of "a society for all" is desirable from an ethical and practical point of view as there are high social, political and economic costs of inequality and exclusion. Social exclusion is linked to increased poverty, reduced growth, higher incidence of crime, social upheaval and threats to public safety.

17. From an ethical point of view, exclusion and destitution are contrary to the basic values of human dignity and human rights. Social exclusion generates and deepens inequalities between people and compromises social justice. Politically, inequalities and exclusion weaken democracy and threaten peace and stability and may lead to violence, civil unrest and open conflict.

18. Economically, social inequalities prevent segments of society from contributing to growth through consumption, savings and investment, and in that way undermine overall economic growth. Inequalities owing to social status, income, geographical location, gender, age, ethnicity or immigration status reduce social mobility. Limited social mobility deepens divisions in society and may lead to fragmentation and impair growth and poverty reduction. It limits the prospects of people living in poverty to increase their productivity and earnings and thereby move out of poverty.

19. Gender discrimination is one of the most pervasive and prevalent forms of institutionalized inequality. Gender cuts across all other social categories and is a marker of identity and inequalities between men and women in all societies. Just as gender discrimination is a grave obstacle to social integration, gender equality should be considered a key measure of social integration.

20. Beyond helping all groups and individuals to gain access to mainstream society, social integration requires the transformation of those social norms and principles that underpin unequal relations. We have to be mindful, however, that not all societies are geared towards inclusion. There may be systems in any given society that are faulty, and inclusion into such systems may not result in social integration but rather perpetuate the existing unequal power relations. Above all, there should be no forms of forced integration, which may be resisted and even considered a violation of human rights.

21. In this context, it is worth noting that there may be certain groups, such as indigenous peoples or religious groups, that do not wish to be "integrated" into a society as it may cause them to loose their identities. Nevertheless, these groups generally welcome socially inclusive policies focusing on achieving greater equality and may desire to be part of an inclusive society provided that they are consulted in the process. Sometimes a preferred term for such groups is "social inclusion".

B. Regional perspectives

Africa

22. In the African context, social exclusion is often seen as a direct result of poverty, which hinders people's participation in economic, social and political spheres of life. Besides generalized poverty, other major causes of exclusion include income inequalities; unequal rural-urban development; unequal distribution of assets, such as land; discrimination based on gender, race, disability and ethnicity; unequal access to social services; lack of social protection strategies; market failures; and unenforced rights.[6]

23. Conflicts and instability are another major cause of social exclusion in Africa — especially for those directly affected, such as internally displaced persons and refugees — as is the prevalence of HIV/AIDS: 68 percent of the HIV/AIDS-infected population lives in sub-Saharan Africa.[7] Violent conflicts and the HIV/AIDS pandemic have given rise to some of the most vulnerable groups in Africa: orphans and infected children together with older women left to care for these children. Orphan children are much less likely to be enrolled in school, which will eventually put them at further risk of social exclusion in adulthood.

24. In 2007, there were close to 12.7 million internally displaced persons in Africa, close to half the people forcibly displaced worldwide. Their number grew that year by 1.6 million, as new or protracted conflicts and generalized violence caused displacement in 13 countries.[8]

25. In order to address the distressing effects of social exclusion, the African Union (AU) ministers in charge of social development adopted the "African Common Position on Social Integration" at the conclusion of their meeting held in

[6] Report of the Ad Hoc Experts Group Meeting on developing supplementary targets and indicators to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals in Africa, Addis Ababa, 7-9 May 2008 (Economic Commission for Africa document ECA/ACGS/MDGs-PAM/EGM/RP/2008/2) and background document.

[7] UNAIDS, "AIDS epidemic update" (Geneva, December 2007).

[8] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2007" (Geneva, 2008).

Windhoek in October 2008. This document notes the prevailing marginalization and exclusion experienced by women, children, people with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older people, refugees, internally displaced persons, migrant workers and their families and other groups. More importantly, it encourages AU member States to promote and accelerate a human rights and human-centred sustainable social development agenda for the continent that is underpinned by a social inclusion agenda placing employment at the centre of development, with an emphasis on extending skills development and comprehensive social protection to all members of society.

Asia and the Pacific

26. The most important trends affecting social inclusion in the Asia-Pacific region include growing inequality, labour migration and population ageing. The Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, 2008[9] observes growing inequalities in the region owing to the neglect of agriculture, noting that such inequality may impede growth and threaten social cohesion by leaving people's skills idle.

27. As of 2005, there were 58 million international migrants in the region, reflecting the increased mobility of people in search of temporary employment within the region. Despite the growth of international migration, protecting the rights of migrant workers has not been properly addressed. Although there are bilateral agreements regulating the movement of workers across borders, they have had little impact on the treatment of migrant workers, who continue to face discrimination, exploitation and abuse. Moreover, there is a growing concern that while migration can benefit families, the prolonged absence of a family member seeking employment often causes marital instability, the break-up of families and social costs to children left behind, including poor performance in school, violent behaviour and delinquency.[10]

28. The Asia-Pacific region is home to the largest population of older persons in the world, currently numbering 400 million and expanding twice as quickly as the general population. Mindful of the growing challenges of population ageing, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has led the region in reviewing the progress achieved in efforts to build a "society for all ages". Thus ESCAP was instrumental in the promotion of the Macao Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific, endorsed by countries of the region in 1999. The plan serves as a regional platform to meet the challenges of population ageing, focusing on specific areas of concern including income security, employment, health, nutrition and social services and the community. To assist the member States in the implementation of the plan, ESCAP issued a set of guidelines specifying time-bound goals and targets that should be established at national and regional levels. Similarly, ESCAP undertook the first regional review of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

Western Asia

29. Reflecting regional concerns, the work of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) concentrates on the determinants of

[9] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.08.II.F.7.

[10] Ibid.

exclusion, such as illiteracy, unemployment and economic inequality, gender discrimination, migration status, geographical location, cultural norms and violations of rights.

30. The region faces long- and short-term refugee problems and hosts a significant migrant labour force. It is considered that many people will remain outside the reach of the developmental benefits of poverty eradication programmes because they lack the status of citizen.

31. In Western Asia poverty is not always the primary cause of exclusion from spheres of participation, opportunities and access to services. As a concept and an experience, exclusion brings together deprivation, discrimination and disempowerment. It is thus thought that aiming at poverty eradication may not address the root causes or societal biases and institutional processes that produce exclusion. A social exclusion analysis is seen as useful for focusing on discrimination and its relation to inequality.[11]

32. In the region, social exclusion is exacerbated by conflict and displacement. In 2007 there were nearly 900,000 new IDPs in the Middle East, as existing conflicts escalated, with a total number reaching 3.5 million and nearly twice as many refugees. Throughout the region, according to data collected by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, minorities were at a greater risk of displacement.

Latin America and the Caribbean

33. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the idea of social cohesion has emerged in response to high poverty (especially among the indigenous and those of African descent), extreme inequality and various forms of discrimination. The region has the highest income inequality in the world and inequality owing to discrimination is still one of the most important problems for social cohesion. Causes of discrimination in Latin America relate to "being poor" (36 per cent), followed by "being old" (16 per cent), having insufficient education (12 per cent), not having contacts (7 per cent) or on account of race (6 per cent). Educational disparities, in turn, are often attributed to ethnic origin, with 34 per cent of indigenous children attending secondary school as compared with 48 per cent in the general population. The overall dropout rate among indigenous pupils is almost a third higher than among non-indigenous pupils.[12]

34. Based on a sense of belonging, social cohesion is predicated on citizens' willingness to support democracy, play a role in public affairs and deliberations and place trust in society's institutions. Solidarity with groups suffering discrimination and exclusion is considered necessary for socially inclusive policies to be successfully implemented while a sense of belonging is built out of greater equity and a greater acceptance of diversity.[13]

35. Since the high degree of inequality and social exclusion in the region is considered a serious obstacle to the smooth functioning of democracy, social cohesion is regarded as an effective means to achieve full citizenship, consolidate

[11] ESCWA, "Social Exclusion in the ESCWA Region" (Beirut, 2008).

[12] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Social Panorama of Latin America 2007" (United Nations publication, Sales No. S.07.II.G.124).

[13] ECLAC, "Social cohesion: inclusion and a sense of belonging in Latin America and the Caribbean" (Santiago, 2007).

democracy and achieve overall well-being in a society. The expansion of economic opportunity, supporting the development of personal capabilities, the promotion of solidarity-based inclusive social protection systems against vulnerabilities and social risks, efficiently managing public finances and recognition of the pluricultural nature of societies are considered good ways of promoting social cohesion.

Developed countries

36. Social exclusion is pervasive in developing and developed regions alike. Promoting social inclusion with a view to preventing and eradicating poverty and exclusion and supporting the integration and participation of all in economic and social life features prominently in the European Union's social policy agenda. Building social inclusion in the European Union mainly focuses on poverty eradication and employment policies, as it is considered that poverty and unemployment are the two most important factors causing exclusion.

37. In 2007, 16 per cent of the European population remained at risk of financial poverty, 20 per cent lived in substandard housing, 10 per cent lived in households where nobody worked and long-term unemployment approached 4 per cent.[14]

38. Since the adoption of common objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion by the European Council at its meeting held in Nice, France in 2000, member States have developed national action plans against poverty and social exclusion. An analysis of those action plans confirms that long-term unemployment, low income, low professional qualification, low education level and poor health are major risk factors for social exclusion in European countries.

39. The European Union has also identified several groups at greater risk of social exclusion, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, single parents, migrants and ethnic minorities (including the Roma population), the homeless, ex-inmates, people with drug and substance abuse problems and those living in a situation of multiple disadvantages.

40. In 2006, over 2.5 million temporary labour migrants arrived in countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), while permanent migration increased by about 5 per cent. For many developed countries, including the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the most challenging social integration issues relate to the social, economic and cultural integration of immigrants.

41. Indigenous peoples in the countries mentioned above consistently lag behind non-indigenous groups on most indicators of well-being. They live shorter lives, have poorer health and education, endure higher unemployment and earn less than the general population. In all of these countries, indigenous peoples' rates of poverty, substance abuse, suicide and incarceration are much higher than those of the general population.

42. In several developed countries, integration as a form of social policy has raised questions of diminished cultural diversity. Some countries experience a shift of responsibility for participating in society and communal life away from the

[14] Commission of the European Communities, "Modernizing social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market", Brussels, 17 October 2007 (document COM(2007) 620 final).

individual onto the Government, resulting in lower civic engagement. This phenomenon can be illustrated by several social cohesion indicators such as lower voter turnout in most OECD countries in the last decade and fewer than half of OECD citizens reporting high trust in different public institutions. Another negative trend is a continuous rise in the prison population of OECD countries over the past 15 years. On the positive side, the rates of work accidents, strikes and suicides have declined.[15]

Interregional cooperation

43. The European Union and Latin American Governments share the promotion of social cohesion as key policy priorities. The Forum on Social Cohesion, held in Santiago, Chile from 23 to 25 September 2007, allowed the two groups of countries to exchange experiences in the formulation and implementation of social cohesion policies, including poverty alleviation, measures against discrimination and exclusion and the recognition of fundamental social rights.

44. A Development Account project involving all regional commissions, entitled "Interregional cooperation to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals process", is currently under way. The project aims at developing additional targets and indicators within the current framework to measure progress towards the Goals, taking into account the inclusion of vulnerable groups, the empowerment of women and health promotion. The common view of the regional commissions is that social exclusion has to be addressed if the Goals are to be met. Promotion of the social inclusion of women and gender equality in the Goals is considered especially important.[16]

C. Social, economic and political trends and social integration

45. In many regions and countries, the growth of participatory democracy is giving rise to heightened awareness among people of the significance of social justice, equality and universality of human rights. The efforts at decentralization of administration and devolution of political power have generally resulted in the formation of more inclusive and participatory policy processes.

46. There is also a growing recognition of the importance of diversity and multiculturalism and the value and contribution of ethnic and cultural differences to the building of society.

47. In the area of employment, concept of decent work, with its basic tenets of rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, is gradually gaining importance and has the potential of leading to social integration as well.

48. Nevertheless, despite the recognition that only cohesive societies are well positioned to respond to social and economic change, too little is being done to promote social cohesion and many forms of social exclusion are on the rise. As noted in the 2005 review of the World Summit for Social Development, not only has globalization led to greater exclusion but the social integration component of

[15] OECD, "Society at a glance: OECD social indicators" (Paris, 2006).

[16] Expert group meetings on developing supplementary targets and indicators for social inclusion, population, gender, equality and health promotion to strengthen the Millennium Development Goals process.

development strategies has largely been ignored. There has been insufficient progress on social policy in general and on social impact analysis and policies promoting social integration in particular. Despite the pronounced commitments to internationally agreed development goals, the promise of taking action towards social integration remains largely unfulfilled.

49. The tendency to rely on market mechanisms to achieve social and economic objectives since the 1980s has not helped advance social integration. This shift in the development approach significantly reduced the ability of the State to promote socially desirable objectives, such as social integration, while inequalities intensified in countries as a result of market-oriented reforms. The current financial crisis may finally reverse this trend.

50. Recent economic trends associated with globalization have run counter to social integration in many parts of the world. The poor and the marginalized have largely been excluded from the benefits of globalization as current employment trends are increasingly producing greater segmentation in the labour market. Although economic growth and globalization of production and markets have led to higher levels of labour participation, many of the new jobs are informal, unstable and badly paid, offering no social protection, while some existing types of employment are made obsolete and economically expendable. The resulting perception of globalization favouring some at the expense of others poses an additional challenge to achieving social integration.

51. Among other trends affecting social integration, growing inequalities and increased mobility within and between countries, the rapid pace of urbanization and population ageing stand out. In most developing countries, a long-standing neglect and lack of investment in agriculture has led to the impoverishment and marginalization of rural communities and forced many people into urban areas which lack economic opportunities. New patterns of subjugation have emerged, whereby those swelling the ranks of the urban poor are cut off from their traditional communities and struggle to gain access to basic amenities such as shelter, water and electricity. Some of the most visible signs of social exclusion in urban areas are housing deprivation, homelessness and expanding slum areas with no basic services. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme estimates that 36.5 per cent of the urban population in the developing world lives in slums, with the rate reaching a staggering 62 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.[17]

52. Discrimination, stigmatization, racism, xenophobia and gender-based violence continue to be some of the biggest barriers to social integration. Abuse within families, often based on patriarchal relations, remains a daily reality of countless women and children. At the same time, more recent forms of stigma and discrimination such as those related to HIV/AIDS status are widespread in many societies.

53. Labour migration has accelerated in pace with expanding trade liberalization and economic interaction among countries. Migrant workers and their families, often exploited and employed mainly in low-paying jobs with no labour rights or any form of social protection, continue to face major obstacles to integration in their host countries. The integration of migrants into the host country society, moreover, should not result in the loss of social and cultural ties with the country of origin. To

[17] UN-Habitat, *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009* (Nairobi, 2008).

the contrary, the maintenance of ties with the country of origin and concurrent openness towards the new country, its culture and people, are both necessary for successful integration. In fact, the process of social integration depends on the degree of cultural adaptation, including the willingness and ability to develop close links with the host country without losing links to the country of origin, in effect developing a "dual identity".

54. Although it is often recognized that countries benefit from homogenous structures in their societies, there are numerous examples of countries with diverse and vibrant ethnic communities that have built dynamic economies offering migrants opportunities to succeed. For migrants, specific aspects of successful integration include equal access to public institutions; respect for cultures and religions; knowledge of the language, culture and institutions of the host country; and a voice in the democratic process.

55. Some countries experience rapid expansion of young populations while, in others, the population is rapidly ageing. Whereas socio-economic background, gender, migrant status or religious beliefs can lead to exclusion of all age groups, youth and the elderly may face double discrimination because of their age.

56. Lack of education and decent employment opportunities are key factors limiting young people's social integration. Of the 130 million illiterate people in the world, nearly 60 per cent are young women.[18] Youth also make up 44 per cent of the total unemployed, although they only represent 25 per cent of the working-age population. The relative disadvantage of youth in the labour market is more pronounced in developing than in developed economies.[19] What makes it even more significant is that young people in these regions account for more than 85 per cent of the global youth population.

57. Within the areas of education and employment, girls and young women frequently face an additional threat of social exclusion based on their age and gender. Young mothers are particularly vulnerable to being excluded since early pregnancies often carry a stigma and force the mothers to drop out of school or to discontinue work if adequate and affordable child care is not available.

58. In some countries, population ageing is already causing a shrinking of the workforce. Where Governments struggle with adequate provisions for an ageing population, in terms of income support and long-term care, families must take up the burden of providing care for the elderly. Such changes may negatively affect intergenerational solidarity, with potentially negative impacts on inclusion.

59. Armed conflict, violence, civil unrest and new forms of violence, including terrorism, are on the rise and capture the international agenda. Social integration has been hampered by conflicts centred around matters of local autonomy, ethnic identity and competition for resources. Rising crime and trafficking in women, children and migrants pose increasing challenges to social integration as well.

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[18] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (www.uis.unesco.org).

[19] International Labour Organization, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market* (Geneva, 2006).

III. The importance of social integration for poverty eradication, full employment and decent work for all

A. Poverty as a form of exclusion

60. Poverty is often associated with the lack of social integration while poverty reduction and decent work are often seen as pathways to social integration and greater inclusion. Poverty can be both the cause and consequence of social exclusion and the very concept of social exclusion helps us understand the nature of poverty, identify its causes and enhance social policy aimed at poverty reduction.

61. There is a growing recognition that poverty can be regarded as a particular form of social exclusion or an accumulation of different forms of exclusion. Poverty is manifested by limited participation in all forms of decision-making and in inadequate access to income, productive employment, education, health services, housing, public services, culture and recourse to justice. In this regard, gender-related exclusion and inequality, such as exclusion of women from basic education, land ownership, credit markets and employment, is of particular significance.

62. Beyond lack of access to economic resources, poverty and exclusion stem from a lack of political and social entitlements making participation in society difficult or impossible. Those experiencing chronic poverty are effectively excluded from political representation and voice. They often are locked into exploitative power relations that deepen their exclusion.

63. A first step towards social integration of people living in poverty consists of meeting their basic human needs, including nutrition, health, water and sanitation, housing and access to education and employment. So long as basic needs go unfulfilled, social integration cannot move forward. At the same time, it is necessary to empower people living in poverty by involving them in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of programmes for poverty eradication. Such programmes should respect the dignity and culture of people living in poverty, use their skills, knowledge and creativity and assist them in getting organized and educated about their rights.

64. From a social integration perspective, poverty can be characterized as a lack or loss of social connections and engagement with formal social and economic networks and institutions. An important dimension of poverty-reduction interventions, therefore, lies in preventing the process of impoverishment that leads to social exclusion.

B. Employment and decent work

65. As regional experience indicates, the labour market is often the weakest link between excluded individuals and groups and the mainstream of society. Casualization and informalization of employment, with less security and stability in professional and personal life, increase vulnerability and deepen social exclusion. The unemployed not only lose their income and social benefits entitlements but may also experience disruptions in their participation in the life of the community and family life.

66. Exclusion from employment owing to racial discrimination persists in many countries. People from marginalized groups have fewer opportunities to obtain the skills necessary for well-paid jobs. Moreover, employers often discriminate against them in hiring and advancement. Discrimination in hiring against members of marginalized groups deepens their exclusion and prevents them from fully contributing to society. It also has a negative impact on efficiency, productivity and growth.

67. Young people have unemployment rates two to three times higher than those of adults. They face higher barriers to employment owing to prevailing stereotypes about their suitability combined with limited work experience and skills. Exclusion and neglect can push young people to engage in crime and illegal activities and thus disengage from the life of the community.

68. There is ample evidence that high unemployment leads to ethnic tensions and fuels resentment against immigrants while deepening gender divisions. Thus unemployment may feed into the so-called "politics of intolerance and racism", causing greater exclusion of migrants and deepening societal divisions.

69. Migrants are typically vulnerable to exclusion and poverty, especially when relegated to low-skilled and low-paying jobs. Their integration into the society is linked to their successful acquisition of status, roles and rights in a country of immigration. It is also linked to the recognition of their current skills and qualifications. Too often, the skills acquired in the country of origin are unrecognized in the host country. Migrants are then required to do menial jobs. Recognition of skills across borders should be a priority in a socially inclusive society as it relates to the use of one's capabilities to fully contribute to society.

70. Equality of opportunity is of special relevance to employment and social integration. It requires enforcement of core labour standards and non-discrimination in access to employment, including the provision of reasonable accommodation, as well as ensuring access to training and skills upgrading.

71. Employment promotion is a socially integrative strategy in many countries and regions. Labour policies promoting social inclusion are based on non-discrimination in employment, equality of treatment, provision of education and training or retraining and the inclusion in labour markets of groups at risk of discrimination, such as youth, older persons, women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples and migrants. Unemployed, displaced workers in need of retraining should be especially targeted.

72. Lack of opportunities for decent work makes it difficult for people to be fully integrated into a society. To counteract the challenges faced by workers, including deteriorating conditions of work and lack of rights, representation and voice at work, as well as inadequate protection in the face of disability, old age or illness, it is believed that the growing focus on decent work with its tenets of employment, rights at work, social dialogue and social protection offers better prospects for social integration.

IV. Existing strategies aimed at promoting social integration

73. People can realize inclusion in keeping with the standards of the society they live in, thanks to their own efforts and by means of support from family, the local

community and State, private and civil society institutions. Such support, however, is often inadequate or non-existent, leaving individuals and groups excluded. It is vital, then, to establish what assistance is needed both for the general population and specific groups that are vulnerable to exclusion.

74. The World Summit for Social Development provided a framework for developing, shaping and implementing socially inclusive policies. Following the Summit, Governments adopted many policies and programmes to counteract the socio-economic trends negatively affecting social integration. The focus of those policies and the approaches cover a broad range including the promotion of social justice and equality, non-discrimination and minority rights, cultural diversity and multicultural education; the adoption of rights-based or group-specific approaches; redistributive policies; and the development of social protection. The practical implementation of such policies, however, has been slow and their promise remains unfulfilled for countless excluded and marginalized people.

A. Social justice, equality, non-discrimination and multicultural education

75. Social justice relates to the principles, values and institutions that must be in place in any given society so that all of its members fulfil their responsibilities towards that society and share in the benefits produced by it. To advance equity and equality of opportunity, anti-discrimination measures need to be taken. Purely legislative measures do not seem to be sufficient in this respect, as the creation of an inclusive society presupposes respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

76. The principles of economic, social, political, civil and cultural rights enshrined in universal human rights are one of the cornerstones of socially inclusive societies. They form a basis for articulating demands and mobilizing action for the fulfilment of human rights.

77. Creating socially inclusive societies also requires that tolerance, mutual respect and the value of diversity be actively promoted through educational curricula starting in elementary schools. Multicultural education has been promoted in several countries to advance respect for cultural difference and do away with prejudice and racial stereotypes. Another useful approach is the promotion of "cultural democracy" which creates space — opportunities and institutions — for marginalized cultures to bring their own contribution to the society at large.

B. Group-specific mandates

78. Working towards inclusion requires clear recognition of specific obstacles faced by different groups in society, particularly those groups that tend to be prone to exclusion such as older people, youth and people with disabilities.

79. A society for all is a society for all ages. Group-specific mandates, such as the World Programme of Action for Youth and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, aim at social integration of the young and the old, respectively, in the mainstream of society.

80. The World Programme of Action for Youth and several regional frameworks, such as the African Youth Charter, the European Youth Pact and the Iberoamerican Convention on Youth Rights, have been instrumental in guiding the formulation and implementation of national youth policies. Nevertheless, they do not provide guidelines to assess the progress made towards achieving the broad goals they outlined. The Secretariat has therefore been tasked to develop concrete benchmarks in the form of specific goals and time-bound targets, which may provide better means to assess national progress.

81. The World Programme of Action for Youth identifies several priority areas and parallel fields of action to address the most pressing concerns faced by young people today. Those seen as essential for fostering the social integration of young people include improved levels of basic education, skill training and literacy, employment creation, the full and effective participation of young people in the life of society and in decision-making.

82. Urgent action is required to ensure the continuing integration and empowerment of older people in rapidly ageing societies. According to the review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, done in 2007-2008, major policy efforts by States focused on the provision of pensions, extending health-care benefits to older persons, adjusting labour markets and care systems to correspond to accelerated demographic ageing, preventing discrimination against and abuse of older persons, and establishing intergenerational solidarity programmes.

83. The achievements in better integrating older persons into all aspects of societal life are encouraging. However, many obstacles remain, including insufficient participation of older persons in the political, economic, social and cultural domains and limited possibilities for them to pursue education and training.

84. The social inclusion and advancement of persons with disabilities rests on recognition of the fact that persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group and that it is the responsibility of the society to reduce environmental and cultural barriers to their participation in all aspects of society on an equal basis with others.

85. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[20] clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to persons with disabilities and identifies areas where adaptations have to be made to enable them to effectively exercise their rights as well as areas where the protection of rights must be reinforced.

86. While indigenous peoples come from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, they share a life of economic and social marginalization with limited access to basic health care and education. They often live in abject poverty and are subject to human rights violations. In many countries, the situation of indigenous peoples stems from the institutionalization of discriminatory practices over a prolonged period of time. Such policies have resulted in the outright exclusion of indigenous peoples from society, or their inclusion under inferior conditions resulting from differential and less beneficial treatment.

87. Many attempts were made in the past to assimilate indigenous peoples into the dominant society which resulted in a loss of indigenous culture and identity. It has since become apparent that forced assimilation or forced integration of indigenous

[20] General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex I.

peoples fails to provide them with opportunities and benefits on a par with the rest of society. Such practices have been detrimental not only to indigenous peoples themselves, but to national growth, social cohesion and political stability.

88. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues emphasizes the importance of a human rights-based and culturally sensitive approach to indigenous people's issues. Socially inclusive policies for indigenous peoples should be based on respect for their world-views, perspectives and experiences, as well as their concepts of well-being and development. Such policies should address the structural causes of exclusion, recognize indigenous peoples' group and individual rights and focus on developing respect and accommodating cultural diversity while creating the conditions for indigenous peoples' full and effective participation in all matters that concern them.

89. The needs of specific groups must be addressed without stigmatizing them or overemphasizing their particular predicament, which could reinforce the fault lines in a society. Sometimes directing resources at disadvantaged groups can exacerbate social discrimination and hamper efforts to gain political support.

C. Participation in decision-making

90. Social integration requires promoting ideals, processes and institutions that enable all members of a society to participate fully in its social, political and economic life. Such participation must be based on equality of rights and opportunities.

91. Participation in social life and networks gives people access to information, opportunities and support, helps them to escape isolation and gain a sense of belonging and empowerment, and tends to protect them from marginalization. It is important that all groups in society be made aware of the causes of poverty and stigmatization so as to create an all-encompassing sense of social solidarity.

92. It is impossible to achieve social inclusion without a high degree of political inclusion. Political inclusion presupposes democratic participation, ensuring that all citizens can play a role in society and can influence policy design, implementation and monitoring.

93. It is, therefore, vital to involve all stakeholders in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions that determine the functioning and well-being of societies. Through political participation, people secure a place in society, from which they can influence the policy design and outcomes. They should be able to influence decisions that have an impact on their lives. In this regard, it is critical to collect and make publicly available data and information that enable people to make informed decisions.

D. Redistributive policies, including social protection

94. For socially inclusive policies to take hold, society must be bound by a social contract, a willingness to support others in times of need. Financial solidarity mechanisms, including progressive taxation, are one of the ways to promote social integration. At the World Social Summit, Governments recognized that social integration required the protection of the weak and that social protection

programmes should promote independence, facilitate the reintegration of people excluded from economic activity and prevent social isolation or stigmatization.

95. There is a growing body of evidence in support of the idea that social protection can be effective as a preventive measure, reducing risks and vulnerabilities and have a great impact on development efforts. Social protection is also an effective tool for addressing both the causes and symptoms of vulnerability and long-lasting inequalities and thus facilitating the building of inclusive societies.

96. Well-designed social protection programmes significantly reduce poverty. In Europe, it is estimated that social transfers reduce the risk of poverty among children by 44 per cent on average.[21] Similarly, in South Africa, the child support grant established in 1998 has become an important poverty-alleviating instrument which has helped millions who take care of children, particularly single mothers who are among the most discriminated members of society.

97. In Brazil, the conditional cash transfer programme Bolsa Familia has succeeded in reaching a large number of the country's socially excluded families and improving their income while securing children's access to basic health care and education. To apply for Bolsa Familia benefits, many people had to acquire documents such as birth certificates or identity cards for the first time. In doing so, they developed awareness of belonging to a larger society than their immediate community, creating a sense of citizenship with its rights and obligations.

98. The experience of countries that have implemented basic, non-contributory social pension schemes for older people points to a significant positive spillover effect across all ages. Studies in sub-Saharan Africa and Brazil indicate that pensions are often invested in nutrition and education for children. Further evidence suggests that regular cash transfers enabled families to shift from subsistence agriculture to sustainable household production.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

99. Socially inclusive societies rally around common objectives and move beyond narrow group interests. However, the most vulnerable in society may not belong to any particular group that could represent their interests and the poorest are not always a homogenous group. That is why working to promote inclusion is an undertaking for the whole of society. It requires a clear analysis of the current situation and the participation of all stakeholders in needs assessment, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes.

100. Advancing social integration also requires political leadership and commitment. National strategies for promoting growth and equity through macroeconomic stability and sound public finances, accompanied by fair and progressive tax systems and social protection mechanisms, are vital in this respect. The task of social integration is not the responsibility of Governments alone but should be shared by all sectors of the economy and society at large, including the

[21] Council of the European Union, "Joint report on social protection and social inclusion 2008", Brussels, 4 March 2008 (document 7274/08).

private sector and civil society organizations. However, it is the responsibility of Governments to set up institutional arrangements that facilitate such involvement at the national and local levels.

101. Ultimately, the successful implementation of socially inclusive strategies will depend on the extent to which individuals and groups are aware of their rights and responsibilities, and Governments are accountable and committed to social justice. That is why measures to strengthen participatory democracy, including mobilizing public opinion and engaging civil society organizations, are crucial for fostering social cohesion.

102. Social policies should be transformative so as to enable the socially excluded and the marginalized to be integrated in society and to break intergenerational poverty and exclusion. Access to social services, especially health and education, is an area where good strategies can be "transformative" in the longer run by closing the gaps in education and health outcomes felt by marginalized groups.

103. The persistence of social exclusion impedes poverty reduction, economic growth and social development and overall social and economic progress. That is why social inclusion must become a high priority for the international community, Governments, civil society and all groups and individuals who have a stake in the social development process. Peace and stability within society and among States may well depend on the success of socially inclusive policies that Member States pursue.

B. Recommendations

National level

104. **Governments should develop socially inclusive policies and mainstream them into national development and poverty reduction strategies. Such policies should be based on respect for diversity and a ban on forced assimilation. To achieve that, Governments may consider establishing an institutional focal point tasked with promoting and monitoring social integration.**

105. **Governments should consider promoting full employment and decent work as central instruments for social and economic inclusion and poverty reduction, with particular attention to socially and economically marginalized groups. Governments should design and implement comprehensive cross-sectoral social policies, including basic social protection schemes for both the formal and informal economies, as instruments to achieve equity, inclusion, stability and cohesion in their societies.**

106. **Governments should actively pursue policies that explicitly prohibit discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status and remove all discriminatory provisions from their national legal frameworks.**

107. **Governments should address barriers to participation and promote the creation of consultative mechanisms that provide opportunities for socially excluded groups, including women, minorities and other marginalized groups, to be heard regarding their needs and aspirations, applying the requirements of relevant international instruments.**

108. **To ensure that results are obtained, special efforts should be made by Governments and society at large to establish evaluation frameworks for social inclusion policies, drawing on indicators that measure outcomes and impact, rather than just inputs and outputs.**

International level

109. **The international community and donor Governments should pay particular attention to the needs of fragile societies, including those emerging from conflict, as well as subregions at risk, in order to promote peacebuilding, social cohesion and constructive community relationships geared at preventing and mitigating violent conflicts.**

110. **Regional intergovernmental entities are invited to facilitate the exchange of good policies and practices aimed at achieving equity, inclusion and cohesion. The establishment of a regionally appropriate "social floor" minimum standard and an overall portability of basic entitlements across borders may be considered.**

111. **The international community may reflect on the current group-specific mandates in order to identify the links and areas of convergence between them. The commonalities found in approaches to different vulnerable groups could form a basis for more effective implementation of those mandates.**